



United States Department of Agriculture  
National Food and Agriculture Council

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NATIONAL FOOD AND AGRICULTURE COUNCIL  
POLICY ON TELEPHONES

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APPROVED: \_\_\_\_\_

Paul W. Johnson, Chairman

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**BACKGROUND**

The USDA Service Center Mission:

USDA Service Centers, in partnership with people and communities, will deliver agricultural, rural development, and natural resource programs with a continuity and quality of service that exceeds customers' expectations and achieves maximum efficiency.

To carry out this mission, we are establishing one-stop service centers offering exceptional service, delivered not only through collocation of the USDA agencies and their partners, but through the installation of a fully integrated telecommunications system in USDA Service Centers, State Offices, and other support offices.

Prior to installation of an integrated telecommunications system, the USDA Service Center agencies have acquired and maintained separate telephone systems and incoming telephone numbers. In support of the Secretary's goal of one-stop service, the LAN/WAN/Voice Project is installing a new, consolidated telephone system in most USDA Service Centers. Consolidated telephone systems consistent with required standards which are already in place will not be replaced. These new telephone systems make it possible to reduce the number of voice lines and optimize data lines.

The advantage for our customers is a single phone number providing access to all service center programs and personnel, including conservation districts, Extension and other entities when they are present. The partner agencies will benefit in reduced operating expenses through the sharing of office equipment, telephone lines, and administrative support.

National FAC policy on installation and operation of the consolidated LAN/WAN/Voice telecommunication services follows:

## **QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE**

The consolidated telephone system is an important tool which allows the employees in the service center to provide the highest quality customer service possible by dealing with every phone call professionally and courteously. All employees of the agencies and partners at a service center are expected to make serving the customer their highest priority. This means that even though the caller may be trying to reach someone else, the employee taking the call will insure that the customer reaches the desired party or is able to leave a message that will be received and responded to in a timely manner.

## **SINGLE PUBLISHED PHONE NUMBER**

One primary phone number will be published for a service center, providing customers access to all partner agencies. This will change the current way in which service centers provide telephone coverage--there will be one telephone number to answer versus two or three.

To implement this single published phone number, the lead agency will:

- In conjunction with partner agencies, select which number will serve as the USDA Service Center telephone number.
- Notify the local exchange carrier (LEC) to consolidate billing and place other numbers in a hunt group. This will allow the other numbers to be accessed by the system when the primary number is busy. (NOTE: The hunt group cannot be implemented until the billing is consolidated for all numbers.)
- Notify the LEC of blue page changes for the office.
- Request a transition message notifying callers of number changes for an appropriate time period.
- Inform customers of the changes.

## **TELEPHONE ANSWERING/AUTO ATTENDANT**

To meet our goal to provide exceptional customer service, incoming telephone calls must be answered and efficiently routed in a professional and courteous manner. To the greatest extent possible designated staff should answer the telephone, route calls to the appropriate service center employee or agency, and take messages as needed. In most instances this means an individual will need to be assigned and trained as the primary telephone receptionist. The task may be shared among the agencies and partners present in the service center, but at any given time one person should be answering incoming calls, transferring the calls to the appropriate party, and taking messages if the party is unavailable.

An auto attendant feature will be installed in offices designated by the State FAC through written notification to the LAN/WAN/Voice Project. The auto attendant assists in directing incoming calls when designated staff are not available or are already busy with a call.

### **ANSWERING MACHINES**

Some USDA Service Center partner agencies have answering machines to receive calls when staff are not available. Service centers with more than 15 people may chose to have two answering machines in case one is taking a message. The answering machine(s) must be centrally located for easy access by all partner agencies. The service center staff will need to establish a procedure for checking the answering machine(s) to insure that messages are received and responded to in a timely manner.

The LAN/WAN/Voice Project will install one converter which allows the answering machine to be attached to the phone system. If two answering machines are to be installed, another converter will need to be purchased locally. If the service center does not have a LAN/WAN/Voice Project installed telephone system, contact the local representative for the particular telephone system and obtain a source for an answering machine converter. The lead agency will follow agency funding and procurement procedures for purchasing a converter.

The LAN/WAN/Voice Project has not budgeted for answering machines. However, the cost of an answering machine can be recovered in one to two months by reducing the number of phone lines.

### **REDUCTION OF PHONE LINES**

Key (KSU) or Private Branch Exchange (PBX) systems will be installed, based on the number of staff present, where existing phone systems do not meet LAN/WAN/Voice standards and support all partner agencies in a service center, State office, or other support office. KSU's will be installed in offices with a staff of 29 or less; larger offices will receive a PBX.

**PBX** - Service center PBX installations will use a minimum 4:1 ratio of staff to voice lines. PBX installations in state, regional and other offices must be handled on a case-by-case basis by the LAN/WAN/Voice Project.

**Key Systems** - The following table lists the number of voice phone lines authorized for a service center based on staffing.

Individuals/ Workstations at Site	Number of Phone Lines Authorized Based on Number of Agencies				
	1 Agency	2 Agencies	3 Agencies	4 Agencies	5 Agencies
1	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2	2	2	N/A	N/A	N/A
3	2	2	3	N/A	N/A
4	2	2	3	4	N/A
5	2	2	3	4	5
6	2	2	3	4	5
7-9	3	3	3	4	5
10-12	4	4	4	4	5

For an office with 13 or more individuals/workstations, use a 3:1 ratio of staff to voice phone lines.

FAX Lines - One fax line will be installed at each service center unless additional lines are approved by the LAN/WAN/Voice Project. Any other fax lines should be removed by placing a request with the LEC.

(NOTE: The above numbers for KSU or PBX systems do NOT include the single fax line, DLOS modem line, Rural Development and FSA X.25 lines, or lines for the router/modem combination.)

Once the integrated phone system has been installed, the lead agency will:

- Eliminate voice phone lines not required based on numbers above.
- Record date and phone numbers removed.
- Record active phone numbers.
- Request that the LEC provide a consolidated bill for phone service. This will be used to establish pro-rata agency shares for billing.
- Validate that billing has been adjusted to correspond to remaining phone lines.
- Notify State LAN/WAN/Voice coordinator of number of lines disconnected. This information will be captured in the Office Information Profile (OIP) database.